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SALT*Turkey and America***Dimming eyes**

FROM OUR ANKARA CORRESPONDENT

The Americans' protracted negotiations with Turkey over the electronic monitoring system they operate in that country—which keeps a watch on Russian military activities, and could be vital for the checking of Salt-2—have run into a quagmire. The latest squelch came when the Turkish government informed the Carter administration that it will grant overflying rights to U-2 “spy planes” only if the Russians approve. This has put the Americans into a tizzy.

With two key tracking stations in Iran now out of action, the Americans were planning to increase the number of flights by U-2s (which operate, it is said, from the British base at Akrotiri in Cyprus, but have to fly over Turkey). The Turks claim that President Carter spelt out his request for overflying rights in a three-page letter to Mr Ecevit, the Turkish prime minister. Until now Mr Ecevit has in principle accepted the need for effective Salt-2 verification. Now, under pressure from the militant left wing of his Republican People's party, he has given the Russians an effective veto. With vivid recollections of the 1960 Gary Powers affair, the Russians have no reason to look kindly on U-2s.

Long before the U-2 issue came up this

week, Turkey had signalled its anxiety not to offend Russia. Last month the Turkish foreign ministry had asked the Carter administration to extract a private assurance from the Russians that they would stay quiet if Mr Ecevit allowed the United States to go on using the existing monitoring stations at Sinop (on the Black Sea coast), Pirinlik (in south-eastern Turkey) and Belbasi (near Ankara). These three sites, plus a navigational control station at Kargaburun, in the Istanbul area, are still in use under an interim agreement which expires on October 9th.

The Americans still hope they can reach a new defence agreement with Turkey by the autumn, which would provide security of tenure for their bases for as long as five years. But in return the Turks are demanding military and economic aid from America running into billions of dollars over the same five-year span. During a lightning visit to Ankara last week a state department envoy, Mr Warren Christopher, explained that congress would never cough up that much. The Turks say they don't believe it. Relations between the two countries have already worsened as a result of the murder of two American servicemen within a month, and terrorist attacks on American offices. And the negotiations with America are made harder by Mr Ecevit's internal troubles—in particular, the danger that he may lose his parliamentary majority in the autumn.